

24th Sunday 2010

Fr. Bob VerEecke, S.J.

What is the burden you are carrying this morning? What is weighing you down? Is it the burden of caring for an aging parent? Is it illness, yours or someone's who is near and dear to you? Is it stresses and strains in your marriage or other relationships? Is it something you carry with you from your past that you cannot let go of? Is it financial concerns? Something having to do with work? Or are you unemployed and desperately need to find work? I'm sure the list of cares and burdens could go on. Or perhaps you are totally care-free, at least for today? Maybe you saw the breathtakingly beautiful sunrise this morning and feel that you don't have a care in the world.

If you are weighed down or burdened this morning, the scriptures we hear today may be especially for your ears and your heart. Very simply the Word of God speaks of burdens being lifted, of the weight and the worry of life being taken off our shoulders and wrapped in the loving embrace of God.

The two brothers in the familiar story of the prodigal son carry great burdens. The eldest is burdened by his self-understanding that he must be "perfect," the dutiful son who does what he is told and always obeys the rules. His greater burden, however, is the resentment that he carries toward his father and brother. You hear that resentment exploding when he "vents" his anger against a father whom he thinks "plays favorites". The younger son carries the burdens of his sinfulness and selfishness which has led him to squander not only his inheritance but his relationship with his father. But as you see in the story the Father welcomes the younger son with open arms, embraces him, takes him back into the family without a question, comment, or condemnation. The prodigality of the father whose only desire is to life up his son is more

breathhtaking than this morning's sunset. And the elder? Who knows? Jesus does not give us "the rest of the story." Does the elder son find "rest"? Does he let his father take the burdens of resentment from him? Those of us who identify with the elder son will have to answer that question! Those who harbor resentment towards a parent for "playing favorites" or a sibling for not "working hard enough" or "not being good enough" or "making a mess of things" will have to answer that question!

When you think of the image of the lost sheep and the shepherd going to find her, what comes to mind? I think of the image of Jesus, the shepherd with the sheep wrapped around his shoulders, carrying her. It is a beautiful image and one that I hope will give you some consolation this morning. For this image is for EWE/ For You (that's a Yoke!)

During my retreat a week or so ago the passage from scripture that kept coming up in my prayer was this "Come to me all you who labor and find life burdensome. Take my yolk upon you and learn from me. And you will find rest for your souls. For my yolk is easy and my burden is light."

Jesus, the crucified, the shepherd who goes out to seek the lost sheep, wants you to exchange your burdens, whatever it is that weighs you down for his. He wants to lift the weight that is so heavy in your heart and exchange it for his which is as light as a feather. Something that weighs almost nothing at all. And is the reason that it feels so light is that Jesus is carrying you?

Yes, if you are thinking of the Poem "Footprints" by Mary Stevenson, so am I. There is something about that poem that is as startling as the beauty of a sunrise that takes your breath away. I'm sure you know it. The poet is in conversation with Jesus and questions why when she looks at her life there are many times

when she sees two sets of footprints in the sand but during the time she is most burdened she sees only one. And Jesus says to her, The times when you saw only one set of footprints was when I carried you.